FOCUS
This section will help you understand
a. why World War II erupted when it did
b. how Canada became involved in the war.

TIMELINE The Road to War

1933
As leader of Germany’s largest party, Hitler is chosen Chancellor of Germany.

1935
Hitler announces that the German army will recruit more than 100,000 men, the limit set by the Treaty of Versailles.

1936
The people in the coal fields of the Saar Valley, given to France under the Treaty of Versailles, vote overwhelmingly to return to Germany. Britain urges France to be moderate in its dealings with Germany. This policy comes to be known as appeasement.

1938
August
Hitler orders his troops into the demilitarized zone known as the Rhineland, which forms a border area between France and Germany. The Germans then rebuild the fortifications there, a flagrant breach of the Treaty of Versailles. The League of Nations does nothing.

September
To fulfill his pledge to unite all German-speaking people under one rule, Hitler annexes Austria. This is known as the Anschluss.

September
Hitler demands the return of the Sudetenland, an area given to Czechoslovakia after World War I despite its having a population of 3.5 million German-speaking people. Believing Hitler’s pledge that this was his last territorial demand, Britain’s Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain signs the Munich Agreement, which hands over the Sudetenland to Germany. The Czechs are outraged, but Chamberlain claims to have secured “Peace in our time.”

October
Germany and Italy sign “Axis” cooperation pact; Japan joins later. These three nations become known as the Axis Powers.

March
Great Britain assures Poland it will protect it from German aggression. Hitler demands the return of all “German” territory given to Poland by the Treaty of Versailles.

August 23
Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union sign a Non-Aggression Pact, promising not to wage war on each other. Hitler can now use force on Poland without having to worry about the Soviet Union.

September 1
Hitler orders the invasion of Poland on the pretext that Polish agents were conducting sabotage along the German-Polish border.

September 3
Britain and France declare war on Germany.

September 10
Canada declares war on Germany.

Blitzkrieg
Blitzkrieg is the German word for “lightning war.” Its aim was to avoid the stalemate of trench warfare by overrunning a country before it had time to defend itself. The typical attack would begin with the Luftwaffe (the German air force) bombing strategic targets such as air fields and communication centres. Following close behind were the Panzers (tanks) and motorized infantry, which rapidly smashed enemy resistance and occupied conquered territory.

Figure 18-1
British Prime Minister Chamberlain waves the Munich Agreement on his return from Germany, promising it will secure “peace in our time.” The Agreement was signed on September 30, 1938. How long did Chamberlain’s “peace” last?
In this way, Germany was able to defeat Poland in less than a month, taking more than 700,000 prisoners. Small countries were especially vulnerable to blitzkrieg tactics. In April 1940, Germany overrun Norway and Denmark. In May, Holland and Belgium were invaded. Sweeping into the heart of France through Belgium and Luxembourg, the Germans forced the French to surrender in a month.

**Deliverance from Dunkirk**

By late May 1940, the Germans had forced the British Expeditionary Force and its French and Belgian allies into Dunkirk, the only Channel port in France not yet taken by the enemy. More than 400,000 Allied soldiers were trapped. Fortunately for the Allies, Hitler made his first major blunder of the war. He listened to Reichsmarshal Herman Goering, who claimed that his Luftwaffe would win a quick victory. This set the stage for a miraculous rescue operation.

The British launched "Operation Dynamo." Between May 27 and June 4, a strange assortment of 850 rescue craft picked up more than 338,000 soldiers from the beaches of Dunkirk. Tanks, trucks, and guns were deliberately wrecked and left behind, but the men were saved to fight another day.

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**Primary Source**

**PRIME MINISTER CHURCHILL**

Winston Churchill, who had succeeded Chamberlain as Prime Minister in May 1940, realized how overwhelming the German victories could seem to the British people. To counteract their effect, he delivered a series of determined speeches in the House of Commons. The following comes from a speech he gave on June 4, 1940, the day the last British soldier was evacuated from Dunkirk.

“We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air; we shall defend our island whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight on the fields and in the streets. We shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender.”

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**RECONNECT**

1. Hitler promised revenge for the Treaty of Versailles. From the timeline in this chapter, outline how he went about getting it.

2. You are an 18-year-old Canadian male or female in 1940. You have read the news headlines of September 11, 1939.
   a. List the emotions you are experiencing, and for each of them give a reason.
   b. Give your opinion. Should Canada be involved in this war? Explain fully.